

## Against the Grain

---

Volume 22 | Issue 2

Article 16

---

April 2010

# Purchase-on-Demand: An Overview of the Literature

Marna Hostetler

*University of South Carolina*, [hostetler@sc.edu](mailto:hostetler@sc.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hostetler, Marna (2010) "Purchase-on-Demand: An Overview of the Literature," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 22: Iss. 2, Article 16.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5505>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

# Purchase-on-Demand: An Overview of the Literature

by **Marna Hostetler** (Head of Access Services, Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina) <hostetler@sc.edu>

**A**lthough it is not a new idea, Purchase-on-Demand is a trend that has truly come into its own over the last decade. This article will provide an overview of the professional literature on the topic and will also discuss new trends to watch. *Library and Information Science Abstracts*, *Library Literature & Information Science*, and *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts* were the primary resources used to identify publications for this overview.

## Purchase-on-Demand: Yes or No?

Purchase-on-Demand is the practice of buying an item — whether it is a book or a journal article — rather than borrowing it through interlibrary loan (ILL) for one-time use. The idea of using ILL statistics to guide purchasing decisions is, of course, decades old, but true Purchase-on-Demand takes that concept a step or two further in terms of inter-departmental collaboration and faith in the library's patron base. Once a newly-purchased item arrives, it is circulated to the patron and is usually added to the library's collection upon its return to the library.

Public libraries seem to have gotten on the user-centered collection development bandwagon a bit earlier than academic libraries. In fact, the earliest references to the idea were found in two articles published more than a century ago. A 1909 article on cooperation between libraries and schools states that large public libraries at that time were working toward building collections that meet "the demand of pupils and teachers and not a demand specified by the library (Actual Cooperation Between Libraries and Schools, 142)." In a second 1909 article, **Rathbone** asserts that multiple copies of certain non-fiction titles should be purchased if requested by a patron, and that circulation staff members should be diligent in helping the librarian select appropriate titles based on their observations of patrons' demands (**Rathbone**, p.229.) Obviously, these efforts are a far cry from current practices, which are fully-enabled by online credit card purchases and ILL tracking software. But it is interesting to consider how the implementation of the idea has developed over one hundred years of technological innovations and philosophical shifts.

The bulk of the current literature on the topic of true purchase-on-demand begins in the early 2000s. In a short article published in June 2003, **Richard Hulsey**, a public librarian, described a "better customer service model" that was cost-effective and speedy (**Hulsey**, 77). His library began experimenting with purchasing new titles requested through ILL in 2000, and the service was eventually expanded to include journal articles and out-of-print materials. At the time

the article was published, **Hulsey's** library was using ILL only occasionally (**Hulsey**, 77).

Academic librarians were also catching on to the concept (**Ward**, 2002 and **Anderson** et al.). An early concern was whether titles requested by ILL patrons would be "useful additions" to a library's collection (**Anderson** et al., 3), but these worries were soon laid to rest. After ten years of ever-increasing use, the practice has been shown to be cost-effective, efficient, and popular with patrons.

## Models

As with most library practices, there are nearly as many Purchase-on-Demand models as there are libraries that do it. However, many academic libraries begin with the following strategies and make adjustments as dictated by local conditions as they proceed:

1. The Interlibrary Loan Department receives the original journal article or loan request.
2. Items are either purchased directly by ILL, or are forwarded to Acquisitions for rush processing.
3. Purchase guidelines are prepared in advance. These commonly include a price limit; a publication date limit (no older than five years, for example); and exclude certain types of material, such as current popular fiction or textbooks.
4. Once the patron is finished with the purchased item, it is added to the library's collection.

The actual workflow may be enhanced in any number of ways, but increased communication and coordination between the ILL, Collection Development, Acquisitions, and Circulation Departments is crucial if the enterprise is to succeed.

## Notable Innovations

Several articles outline very specific uses for the purchase-on-demand concept. **Pellack's** article on obtaining industry standards describes the hybrid approach her library, **Iowa State University**, uses to supplement its paper subscriptions to industry standards. This approach eliminated the need to purchase high-cost full-text access to electronic standards and maintained the "historical" or superseded standards which were sometimes needed (**Pellack**, 23). **Gibson and Kirkwood's** recent article explains the **University of Arkansas's** decision to purchase issues from a specific journal title — *Materials Research Society Proceedings* — rather than borrow them. Once the issues arrive, ILL staff members scan the requested articles and deliver them to the requesting patrons, and the issues are added to the library's collection.

In both of these approaches, money

that might have gone toward purchasing full subscriptions to these materials was instead channeled into purchasing specific items, as needed, resulting in what these librarians believe are more useful library collections.

Another interesting method is described in Bertuca et al.'s article on the collaboration between academic libraries at the **University at Buffalo** and **Empire State College**. Both institutions are part of the **State University of New York System**. The program allows **Empire State College** patrons to borrow items from the **University at Buffalo**, which is not an uncommon arrangement. But if a requested item is not held by the **University at Buffalo**, it is purchased through **Amazon** with **Empire State College** funds, and **Amazon** sends it directly to the patron's home. When the book is returned, it is added to the **University at Buffalo's** library collection. The entire process is enabled by the **OCLC ILLiad** software, and, as the title of the article states, it is a wonderful example of sharing collections, staff, and expertise.

Finally, the unique perspective of the **University of Hong Kong** is provided in **Chan's** 2004 article. Because of the lengthy turnaround time for borrowing items not locally available, the University decided to turn all overseas ILL requests into purchase requests. If the Acquisitions Department could not find a vendor within five days, the request was routed back to ILL for borrowing. Interestingly, the study found that for this library, purchasing items was actually slower than borrowing them — by an average of 11 days — and the cost was much higher. However, because the purchased items were used more than once, the cost per use was deemed acceptable.

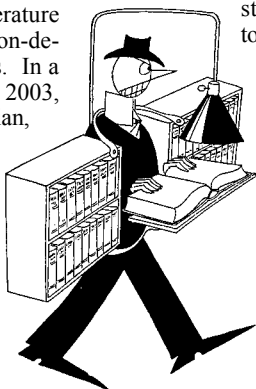
## Trends to Watch

**Purchasing Articles Directly from Publishers** — This idea is not new, but the practice has become progressively more common as more and more ILL practitioners have gained access to purchasing cards through their institutions. It is also increasingly necessary, as some journals are "online only," and newly-written articles are sometimes unavailable elsewhere. Little has been written on this topic, but a good discussion may be found in **Reighart and Oberlander**, pp. 186-187.

Many factors go into making the decision to purchase an article on the fly, including:

1. Is the article even available in print? Indexes sometimes list articles before they are published.
2. Is the article under embargo?
3. Does the patron want several or all articles in a certain journal issue?
4. Is it, in fact, cheaper to purchase the article from the publisher than to pay copyright royalties?
5. When does the patron want the article — today or next month?

*continued on page 47*



6. Does the patron want a color copy of the article? Color scans are sometimes difficult to obtain through normal ILL channels.

**Purchasing Books Directly from Vendors Through OCLC** — Now that some publishers and book vendors have their own OCLC symbols, it is possible to purchase books through OCLC. A leader in this trend is **Better World Books, Inc.**, based in Mishawaka, IN and using the OCLC symbol "QUICK." **Better World Books** collects its inventory through book drives and donations from colleges, universities, libraries, and thrift stores. Items borrowed from **Better World Books** may be purchased by the borrowing library or by the patron, and profits go toward "non-profit literacy programs" (**Better World Books**, <http://www.betterworldbooks.com/>).

**eBooks** — Another new trend to watch is the practice of loading entire eBook collections from one or more vendors into a library's catalog but only purchasing those that are selected and used by the library's patrons (**Cassell**, 139). A twist on this approach is using the library's **Amazon** account to download new titles — which are notoriously difficult to borrow through ILL — to a **Kindle** or similar device for checkout to the patron (Oder, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6666004.html>). Only the requested title is loaded onto the device, and once the **Kindle** is returned to the library, that title is removed.

All of these are interesting and still-developing areas of collection development, and I suspect more will be written on each idea in future years.

### Conclusion

Many libraries love purchase-on-demand because it is cheaper and usually faster than, or just as fast as, traditional ILL. Local resources may be put to better use rather than investing time and money on union catalogs and other databases (**Hulsey**, 77), and items purchased by demand of the patron tend to circulate more often than items purchased through other means (**Ward**, 103). In addition, interdisciplinary titles that may be missed by subject bibliographers are frequently requested through purchase-on-demand programs, making for a more well-rounded collection overall. (**Anderson et al.**, 8)

Many patrons love these programs because it provides them a voice in what their libraries collect. The traditional collection development model does not include graduate students. But because graduate students are generally heavy users of ILL, purchase-on-demand programs allow this important group of researchers to influence a library's collection (**Anderson et al.**, 9). Patrons may also be able to keep purchased material for longer than is normally allowed for borrowed items, and speedy turnaround time is also popular. Whether the program is implemented simply or a hybrid or specialized approach is adopted, purchase-on-demand is yet another tool for libraries trying to please patrons in today's customer-centered environment.

### References

- "Actual Cooperation Between Libraries and Schools," *Public Libraries* 14 (April 1909): 142-6.
- Alder, Nancy Lichten**, "Direct Purchase as a Function of Interlibrary Loan: Buying Books versus Borrowing," *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery and Electronic Reserve* 18, no. 1 (2007): 9-15.
- Anderson, Kristine J., Robert S. Freeman, Jean-Pierre V.M. Herubel, Lawrence J. Mykytiuk, Judith M. Nixon and Suzanne M. Ward**, "Buy, Don't Borrow," *Collection Management* 27, no. 3 (2003): 1-11.
- Bertuca, Cynthia et al.**, "Two Iliad Clients, One Desktop, Purchase on Demand: Sharing a University's Collection, Staff and Expertise," *Journal of Access Services* 6 (2009): 497-512.
- Cassell, Kay Ann**, "Editorial," *Collection Building* 28, no. 4 (2009): 139.
- Chan, Gayle Rosemary Y.C.**, "Purchase Instead of Borrow," *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Information Supply* 14, no. 4 (2004): 23-37.
- Comer, Alberta, Elizabeth A. Lorenzen**, "Biz of Acq — Is Purchase-on-demand a Worthy Model? Do Patrons Really Know What They Want?" *Against the Grain* v.17#1 (February 2005): p.75-78.
- Gibson, Tess M. and Patricia E. Kirkwood**, "A Purchase-on-Demand Pilot Project at the University of Arkansas, for the Proceedings of the Materials Research Society Symposium," *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserve* 19, no. 1 (2009): 47-56.
- Hulsey, Richard**, "Purchase on Demand: A Better Customer Service Model," *Library Journal* June 1 (2003): 77.
- Oder, Norman**, "At BYU, Kindle Program on Hold, But University of Nebraska-Omaha's Program Going Strong," *Library Journal.com*, June 17, 2009. Available at: <http://www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6666004.html>.
- Pellack, Lorraine J.**, "Industry Standards in ARL Libraries: Electronic and On-Demand," *Collection Building* 24, no.1 (2005): 20-28.
- Rathbone, F.L.**, "Borrower and His Book," *New York Libraries* 1, July (1909): 228-32.
- Reighart, Renee and Cyril Oberlander**, "Exploring the Future of Interlibrary Loan: Generalizing the Experience of the University of Virginia, USA," *Interlending & Document Supply* 36, no. 4 (2008): 184-190.
- Tucker, Jim and Mary Sue Hoyle**, "Understanding Embargoes and Utilizing Other Services," *The Serials Librarian* 45, no. 3 (2003): 115-117.
- Ward, Suzanne M.**, "Books on Demand: Just-in-Time Acquisitions," *Out-of-Print and Special Collections Materials: Acquisition and Purchasing Options* 27 (2002): 95-107.
- Zopfi-Jordan, David**, "Purchasing or Borrowing: Making Interlibrary Loan Decisions That Enhance Patron Satisfaction," *Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserve* 18, no. 3 (2008): 387-394.
- <http://www.betterworldbooks.com/>, accessed January 10, 2010. 🐼

## Developing a Policy for Kindle and iPod Content: One Library's Experience

by **Margaret Foote** (Coordinator, Collection Services, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries)  
<[Margaret.Foote@EKU.edu](mailto:Margaret.Foote@EKU.edu)>



**K**indles and other electronic book readers, **iPod Touch**, and other audio files are beginning to be made available to users of academic and public libraries. Despite the twenty-first century technology, the content for both types of devices still requires some sort of policy, just as their print counterparts have needed the same. What kind of policy do they

need, and how detailed a policy is required? **Eastern Kentucky University Libraries** developed a user-driven model, and adjusted the policy with experience.

The idea of offering the **Amazon Kindle** and the **Apple iPod Touch** to **EKU** faculty, staff, and students began to take shape in the spring and summer of 2009. Library leadership

thought that patrons who had never used a **Kindle** or **iPod** would enjoy becoming familiar with these devices, and those already acquainted with them would appreciate the opportunity to check out a **Kindle** or **iPod** from the library. In addition, the library had entered into a part-

*continued on page 48*